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The EDITH *and* LORNE PIERCE
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Queen's University at Kingston

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REV. GAVIN LANG

AND

UNION.

So long as Mr. Lang confined himself to issuing an Anti-union manifesto to his own congregation, even though he pasted it on to the "Presbyterian," outsiders could afford to look on with comparative indifference, as they knew that there were not wanting men in that congregation quite competent to guard the interests of Union. But as he has chosen to send forth a new and enlarged edition of the original, to a certain number of the Ministers of the Synod, claiming that in "common fairness" they ought to encourage its circulation, he has thereby challenged the criticism of the church at large. As to his attack upon Dr. Cook and Mr. Croil, he has greatly miscalculated if he thinks it is even in his power to detract from the reputation they enjoyed before he had yet emerged from his swaddling bands. The hearty outburst of honest indignation, to which they gave utterance at the result of Mr. Lang's intriguing, on the memorable Saturday night and Sunday to which he refers, was a true expression of the sentiments of the entire Presbyterian community and of many outside of it, although more calculating persons would have suppressed their feelings, at least until their ends were gained. The "universally respected Senator," to whom the pamphlet alludes, and certain well meaning Frenchmen who followed his lead, were misled by Mr. Lang once, but are never likely to be so again. He is always attempting surprises. Conscious that his plans cannot stand deliberation, like weak creatures generally, he has recourse to stratagem. It was not discreditable to the Councillors to be loath to think that a minister could get up such a story as he told them, unless it were founded on facts; but what shall be said of the man who traded upon the credibility of his

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profession, and prostituted the special advantages of his position, merely to show that he had it in his power to embarrass the Synod when it would not be guided by him? Mr. Lang did not seem to care though a dead lock ensued between the Legislative Council of Quebec and the Presbyterians of the Dominion, so long as he had gained his point by any means whatever; but the honorable gentlemen who at first befriended him have doubtless had their eyes opened to the sort of man he was that would to suit his convenience try to make them a cat's paw.

As to the legal points raised by Mr. Lang, the Synod may be presumed to understand its own laws and practice better than he. The Synod did *not* dismiss the overture from the congregation of Lindsay anent Union in 1870. It disposed of the overture by saying that its terms had already been substantially complied with. (Synod Minutes, 1870, p. 37). Mr. Lang claims that the action anent Union should only have been taken as the result of an overture. I should like him to give his authority. As the "Barrier Act" is made to play an important part in this business, it is as well to embody it here: "That the *Legislative* enactments of this Synod be regularly transmitted to the several Presbyteries and be in force for one year, if the dissent of a majority of Presbyteries be intimated to the meeting of Synod next after that at which such enactments shall have been respectively made-
* * * If the dissent of a majority of the Presbyteries is not intimated at next session, this overture shall be held as approved." (Synod Minutes 1838, p. 15). It is only legislative enactments that require to be thus treated, and the form in which they are presented is not prescribed—it may be simply a resolution or a more formal overture, beginning with the customary "Whereas" and ending with "it is humbly overtured." When the Union question was taken up in 1870, no Legislation was proposed, but only the appointment of a committee for conference (Minutes 1870, p. 32) In the Minutes for 1868 pp. 28 and 33 will be found motions with reference to a conference with the Wesleyan Methodists, and there was no foregoing overture on the subject. In the Minutes for 1852, p. 20, will be found the appointment of the late Dr. McGill and Hon. Chief Justice McLean to "draw up a minute expressive of the views of this Synod in regard to the importance and desirableness of greater Union among the several branches of the Presbyterian Church in Canada," without any overture. Mr. Lang finds fault with the Synod for being influenced by a letter received from outside the Church. But I have yet to learn that it is not free to receive letters from any quarter, and to act upon them as far as may

be convenient. It is only matters of Legislation that require to be dealt with in the form of overture, not those of administration, to which class the appointment of committees belongs. Before final action was taken with reference to Union, everything relating to it in the shape of Legislation was sent down to Presbyteries for consideration. (Synod Minutes 1873, p. 35, 1874, p. 42). Exactly the same course as to the mode of initiating and disposing of Union was followed in the United States Assemblies prior to their Union in 1869, (Memorial vol. pp. 250, 356). More was done in our case than was demanded by either the constitution or the practice of the Church,—it was submitted to Kirk sessions and congregations as well. In the United States only Presbyteries were consulted, and the resolution passed was that a two-thirds vote of these would be sufficient to warrant the consummation of Union.

Then as to Mr. Lang's wonderful manipulation of the figures in counting the votes cast, he must think his readers very gullible indeed, and deem it his office to gull them, if he thinks they will swallow such stuff as he has written on this point for gospel truth. Judging from this specimen of his skill in that line he would not be likely to gain a prize at "doing sums." The facts briefly stated are, that the Presbyteries, whose decision according to the constitution of the church settled the matter, all voted for the Union, taking the first and second votes into account. One Presbytery returned against it in June 1874, but voted for it finally before November 1874. The returns of two Presbyteries in favour of Union had not reached the meeting of Synod at Toronto last year, owing to their having been addressed to the stated Clerk in his absence. Taking these into account 10 Presbyteries out of 11 voted "Yea," none "Nay"—and the one that made no return in November voted "Yea" in June, and is known to be still unanimously in favor of it. In June 1874 there were 109 fully constituted Kirk-Sessions. Of these 80 voted "Yea" to the last remit, 12 "Nay," and 17 made no return. The remaining 29 Kirk-Sessions to which blanks were sent were of vacant congregations, and many of them nearly defunct, and therefore returns in most cases were not to be expected from them. Of the 123 congregations having a Minister when the last remit was sent down, 114 made returns, 104 "yea," 10 "nay," and 9 no returns. The rest were vacant and this accounts for the other 22 that gave no reply. The impression sought to be conveyed by Mr. Lang, therefore, that an inadequate expression of the wishes of the people was given in these returns is false. Almost every *live* Session and Congregation in the Synod voted. One would have thought that he would be the last man in the country to draw attention to the fact, that the number

voting for the latter remit was smaller than that for the former. And one would suppose his personal knowledge and experience would have made him ashamed to try to account for the diminution of numbers on the ground of increased hostility to the Union. What was the reason that he refused to give his own Session and Congregation an opportunity of pronouncing upon the final remit? Because he knew that the Session that voted *against* it before, would vote *for* it the second time, and that an increased majority for it would be found in the congregation. The true reason why there were fewer returns for it the second time than the first, every one knows, is that after the first vote union was taken for granted, and the people were impatient of being asked to vote for it a second time, merely on grounds of detail in the basis. The writer's own congregation which attended the first meeting in large numbers, and voted unanimously for the Union, could scarcely be got to attend the second meeting; and two vacant congregations in the Presbytery with which he is connected, positively declined to have a second meeting on the ground that they had *already* voted for Union. The *principle* of Union was what the people cared for, and they were contented to leave it to the Church Courts to settle the *terms*. The same explanation is to be given why the vote at Toronto was smaller than at Ottawa. The decision in June was regarded as virtually settling the question in favour of Union, and therefore its friends did not all attend, while every member opposed to it was on the ground. How can Mr. Lang dare say that the Synod consisted last year of 281 members, in the face of the roll in members' hands? Does he think he can *make* truth by his *ipse dixit*? In June the roll (pp. 8-14 Synod Minutes) shows 221 members that could take seats; of these there were present 123, (June Minutes pp. 15-16.)—In November 222 could have claimed seats, (Minutes pp. 5-9,) but only 109 were in their places, (pp. 9-10.) The final vote was taken at two o'clock in the morning, all the opposition being present; but several of the friends of union disgusted with the delay in getting to the vote had left for home—the remainder of the 24 whose names are enrolled as having been present at one or either of the *Sederunts*, with the exception of two or three, had gone to their beds, and yet Mr. Lang has the audacity to put down 20 as having "declined to vote though present," although it is well known that every absentee was in favour of Union. Let Mr. Lang mention the name of one of these who was opposed to Union. But he has repeated so often his statement about the numbers of the Synod that, though he has been frequently corrected, he seems to have sunk into the condition indicated by the Apostle in 2 Thess.

2. 11. Of 109 who could vote 85 voted, and of these 68 were in favour of Union and 17 against it, and two of these 17 immediately afterwards withdrew their opposition. Mr. Lang assumes that the names on the Synod Roll, that did not go to Toronto, are to be considered as having "given no vote," and so may be regarded as either indifferent or opposed to it. But besides that the most of them had already voted in their quality as members of congregations, Sessions and Presbyteries, the presumption surely is that no smaller a proportion of the absent was for the Union than of the present, and how dares he say that they "have not pronounced in favour of Union?" Mr. Lang knows that those absent from any meeting are bound by the action of those present, even though the principle of our "Barrier Act" did not lay down the rule that those not *dissenting* are to be held as *consenting*. According to this law the vote should read 205 for Union to 17 against. Mr. Lang says the "Barrier Act contemplates an interval of 12 months between the transmission and answering of remits." Of that readers can judge for themselves. It says no such thing: it is at the next Session the returns are to be answered, whenever that next Session is held. All that it contemplates is that Presbyteries shall have sufficient opportunity of considering an overture sent down to them. The conditions of the Act were fully implemented in connection with the Union negotiations: Presbyteries were specially *enjoined* to discuss the *remit* in the interval of five months between the meeting at Ottawa and that at Toronto.

It is evidently a sore point with him that he and his friends could not operate so successfully upon the Ontario Legislature as they did for a time upon that of Quebec. It was not *habitans* they had to work among in the former case, and so all appeals to ignorance and religious jealousy fell upon unwilling ears. His reference to Vice-Chancellor Proudfoot's judgment is an unfortunate one: the all sufficient answer to it being, that the learned Judge did not grant the *injunction* asked of him.

Mr Lang has the hardihood to repeat what he is reported to have said at Quebec, with regard to the mass meeting in Montreal, that St. Paul's church was not half full, notwithstanding that there were 30,000 Presbyterians in the city, and that three fourths of those present belonged to the Canada Presbyterian Church. Is Mr. Lang's word, though he was 160 miles off, to be taken before that of the newspaper reporters and of others present, who say that if those who came late to the meeting and crowded into the back seats and stood in the aisles and in the lobby had come to the front, the church accomodating 1,000

people would have been comfortably filled, and that on a bitterly cold night. His statement as to the Presbyterian population of the city is a specimen of the utter recklessness of the man. According to the census, four years ago, in the city alone there were only 8,918 Presbyterians, including the Americans, and if the surrounding villages are taken into account, they number 10,069. To-day the number will probably be 12,000. Of course no attempt was made to discriminate between the Canada Presbyterians and the Kirk-folk as they equally with our people were interested in the most important bill before the Legislature, the only bill, indeed, that had special reference to the Province of Quebec, but that three-fourths of that meeting were Canada Presbyterians is very unlikely. It is perhaps not to be wondered at that Mr. Lang should seek to belittle the Delegation, the mass meeting and the petitions, and that he should find it hard to forgive the movers in them. It was they that effectually extinguished his hopes at Quebec. He says it was the Provincial Government that interposed to save the bills owing to the imminence of a general election. But taking this ground, why did they interpose at that particular juncture and not before? Just because the excitement at Montreal and elsewhere left no room for doubt in their minds that Mr. Lang's representations were false and Dr. Cook's true, as to which side the people were on. Where does he find his score of Presbyterian pulpits in Montreal? At the very most there are only 11 or 12, and no action anent the petition was taken in several of these. The gentlemen conducting the meeting at St. Paul's Church, Montreal, were not novices in such matters so as to need dictation from Mr. Lang as to the manner in which a vote should be taken. It is not customary for a chairman to ask for amendments, or to do more than ask for the approval of motions, if no opposition is offered to them. But what became of the "one-and-twenty" Montreal signers of Mr. Lang's Anti-Union petition that they did not venture to divide the meeting on the Union question?

Mr Lang evidently feels annoyed that he did not succeed in his discreditable attempt, which he is not ashamed to confess, to mutilate the bills when he discovered that he could not prevent their passing. He even claims to have gained this point. But the change from 6 months to 2 years was made at the instance of one of the friends of the bill, and improves it in the interests of Union, as Mr. Lang will find out before all is over. He insinuates that the effect of it will be to postpone the entrance into the Union of all congregations that do not vote for going into it until the expiry of two years. The very contrary is the case. As soon as the Moderators of the negotiating

Churches "shall have signed the terms of Union agreed upon," all congregations now on the Synod roll become congregations in the United Church, and will so remain, if within 6 months in Ontario, and 2 years in Quebec, they do not regularly vote themselves out. I fancy it will require more than Mr. Lang's persuasion to get them to vote themselves out. It is true the clause in the Quebec General Act referring to the Temporalities' Fund does not tally exactly with the Temporalities' Act itself, but it is by the latter and not by the former that the Fund will be administered, and it is all right, notwithstanding the clause regarding successors Mr. Lang refers to, which will be practically inoperative. He speaks of the Canada Presbyterian Church in a way that is nowise justified by facts. Throughout the negotiations, in all conferences between the bodies, the Canada Presbyterians have deferred to our branch of the Church to a degree that is creditable to them, considering their superior numbers, and that lays us under the greatest obligations. He refers to a minority in our Synod as if it were something separate from the Synod itself, to be conferred with and treated with consideration. Does he mean that the Synod as a whole should abdicate its functions of thinking and acting according to majorities and be governed by a handful of men? Or does he mean that his childish overture regarding the Temporalities' Fund in 1873, from the date of the rejection of which his opposition to Union began, should have been adopted although it was an outrage upon the common sense of the House? The Synod was not going to stultify itself to save his feelings, even at the risk of driving him into opposition. As he has referred to the old disruption times, this much can be said with safety: the "Free Church," which he holds in such horror, was never even *accused* of having had recourse to such means of dishonouring our church or of opposing its wishes, as Mr. Lang has lately employed, although a constituent member of it.

Then he speaks all through this pamphlet as if he were the dictator, at whose bidding the opposition to the Union would rise or fall. The ministers and congregations giving him any countenance will see at how high a rate he estimates them, it is the lifting of *his* finger, not any rights of *theirs* at stake, that is to determine peace or war. And as the Synod went on the even tenor of its way last year, regardless of his threats and entreaties, so will it do again. It knows how much Mr. Lang has in his power, and that is *nil*. By the constitutional action of the Synod, it will merge itself into the new united body, "the Presbyterian church in Canada," and the historical "Presbyterian church of Canada in connection with the church of Scotland" cannot

be perpetuated, as Mr. Lang insinuates. It will be ecclesiastically continued under a new name, and the high Courts of Parliament have provided that all its property shall still belong to it under this new designation. No fragment of it remaining out of the Union can, therefore, receive either ecclesiastical or civil recognition under the old name, after the union, although there is nothing to hinder the malcontents in all the negotiating churches in this free country from uniting and constituting themselves under any name they may choose. But whatever a few cross-grained ministers in these Upper Provinces may do, there are none of our congregations that will decline to be united to the great Presbyterian Church of the Dominion that will worthily represent all that is essential in the history and principles of the Church of our fathers.

The writer has not signed his name to the foregoing, not because he is ashamed of it, but simply as a protest against the assumption that runs through Mr. Lang's pamphlet, that because *he* says so and so it must be believed. Mr. Lang's position will not help his logic or his knowledge. It is the advantage of an impersonal press that it leaves men to judge of what is right or wrong, true or false in itself, apart from the writer. Whatever weight might attach to his name, the writer prefers to spread his arguments and statements, rather than himself before his readers.

A MEMBER OF SYNOD.



